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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

27 April 1954

PROBABLE CONSEQUENCES IN FRANCE OF THE FALL OF DIEN BIEN PHU

1. We believe that the fall of Dien Bien Phu alone would not cause the collapse of the Laniel Government or a radical change in French policy in Indo-China so long as the Geneva Conference offers some prospect of a settlement in Indo-China. However, it would reduce the willingness of the Laniel Government to continue the war. To French public and parliamentary opinion this military defeat would represent the failure of the Navarre plan. It would strengthen the French belief that France cannot win in Indo-China, and it would increase parliamentary pressure upon the French Government to reach an Indo-China settlement at Geneva. It would also reduce support for US policies in France, particularly if the Laniel Government in its explanation of the military defeat should emphasize US refusal to provide air support for Dien Bien Phu and if the US stand at Geneva should appear intractable to the French.

2. The French people and government have concentrated their hopes upon Geneva for a settlement in Indo-China. They have almost certainly abandoned hope that the threat of US

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involvement would force the cessation of hostilities or that a settlement might be obtained through US recognition of Communist China or Communist Chinese admission to the UN. The failure of these hopes and the fall of Dien Bien Phu might impel the Laniel Government to press for US-UK approval of an Indo-China settlement based upon a partition of Indo-China or a cease-fire which would necessarily involve such a partition.

3. Following the fall of Dien Bien Phu, we believe that the French Government would announce that it was sending additional forces from France to Indo-China, but that this announcement would be designed primarily to impress the Communist states at Geneva with French resolution. For the same purpose of strengthening the French hand in the Geneva negotiations, the French would continue to press the US for further support of the Indo-China war, including commitment of US troops. On the other hand, we believe that the Laniel Government fears the internationalization of the conflict in Indo-China, because it would increase the risks of general war. However, if the Communists refused to negotiate an "honorable" settlement and demanded immediate French withdrawal from Indo-China, we believe that the French Government would probably accept, as a last resort, internationalization of the conflict in Indo-China.

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ALIGNMENTS IN THE FRENCH NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

